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# Impact of Economic and Cultural Factors on Television Production in Small Nations

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## SUMMARY

*While analyzing Lithuanian television production (generic diversity and TV news output on public service and commercial stations), discussion here moves on several levels of analysis. More specifically, this paper addresses economic and journalistic cultural parameters as key factors affecting contemporary media changes in Lithuania and other small Baltic nations. As media practice reveals, liberalization of the media, its gradual transition from the state-funded to the market-driven model and changing conditions of professional journalism has made the media in the three Baltic countries very sensitive to market mechanisms. On the one hand, small size of media market, shrinking possibilities of media advertising and growing competitiveness among media players set up favorable conditions for commercialization and popularization of media content. On the other hand, the cultural<sup>1</sup> factor is of no less importance when assessing TV production particularities in the countries of young democracy. Based on empirical evidence (generic analysis of TV production on different channels), the authors observe increasing emphasis on entertainment and soft programming rather than informational and analytical programs on public service and commercial television. At the same*

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*time, intensions are observed to follow the requirements of journalistic professionalism (diverse and balanced reporting) on TV news programs.*

Key words: Baltic media, Lithuanian TV production, small market, journalism culture, public interest, public service, commercialization

### **Introduction: small markets with peculiar journalistic cultures**

The size of the country affects the development and the structure of the media system. And this happens in several ways. Small production and sales markets, interventions of foreign media products, and other challenges associated with limited numbers of producers, consumers and advertising money make operations of media in small states very different.

As popularly conceived, the issue of market size is among the most crucial factors affecting state policies (Puppis, 2009; Balčytienė, 2009b). Cultural industries (such as film, music and TV production) are very susceptible to all kinds of restrictions, such as linguistic, cultural and financial, to mention just a few. Indeed, media production (films, series, reality and talk shows) costs the same amount of money independently from the size of the market where it was produced. However, countries with small numbers of audiences and small linguistic communities have fewer home market stakeholders to pay for the production.

Small countries are less influential in global terms. In most cases, these countries act as importers of cultural products and ideas, and because of that small countries are more severely affected by global influences, such as commercialization. Also, in small countries, professional communities of journalists, editors, producers and screenwriters are very small. Such countries have fewer financial resources to produce high quality domestic products to compete on international scale or with foreign production. A particular concern, therefore, for smaller markets is the availability of creative ideas and financial resources to support the production of domestic content (local news, analytical and investigative reporting), as opposed to less expensive but imported content (news from international wire services, international programs) (Doyle, 2002).

In addition, different countries also have different professional cultures (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). For example, media marketization in the Baltic States is a direct outcome of very liberal regulation of the media complemented with weak historical traditions of professional journalism development (Balčytienė & Lauk, 2005; Lauk, 2008; Balčytienė, 2008; Balčytienė, 2009a). Indeed, although being very small, the Baltic countries provide enough audience for many suppliers but, at the

same time, the liberal market in Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia does not support the development of quality journalism due to the absence of adequate professional culture which is manifested through the lack of media accountability, lack of professional autonomy, and lack of professional organizational management to distribute available resources to perform investigative and analytical journalism functions (Balčytienė & Naprytė, 2009). As reported in many international studies, media commercialization and homogenization of journalism are observed in many countries around the world, but their outcomes differ in different national contexts. For example, while in the Baltic States cheap production dominates the media scene, in the small Nordic countries, where journalism has grown up with strong professionalism requirements and social obligations to society, it is less at risk in severe competition and market-oriented situations (Nord, 2008; Lund & Berg, 2009).

Briefly, media production is strongly affected by histories, traditions, values and norms – in short, by cultural factors. Consequently, media production and communication is not only a technical profession with its routines, skills and competences. It is affected not only by economic factors and financial indicators. Rather, it is closely linked with the country's more general culture, which draws our attention to the idea of 'journalism cultures' and places journalism in a broader organizational context in which it grows and develops (cf. Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

### **Stability and change in the Baltic television sector**

Since the transition to a free market economy and a consolidated democracy there have been several divergences (due to historical, social and technological reasons) observed across media systems and journalism cultures of the three Baltic countries. Despite certain differences, media systems and journalism practices in the Baltic States can be studied and researched as belonging to a single group of media systems with defining characteristics such as each country having a small market<sup>2</sup> (with population varying from 1.34 million in Estonia to 2.27 million in Latvia and 3.36 million in Lithuania), very liberal media regulation and weak media accountability. Some of the parameters in these three characteristics disclose aspects which have more or less an 'objective character' such as the size and wealth of the market, audience size and difference in major linguistic<sup>3</sup> groups in the country as well as religious and ethnic diversity, and so forth. Other parameters constitute 'subjective' (or culturally determined) features, for example, propensity of people to consume media, or general openness of the nation to innovations.

While the Baltic media markets are of comparable size (the three Baltic countries are among the smallest in Europe), few differences are observed in their media

structures. In Estonia, for example, newspaper organizations are the dominant national news agenda setters and have the biggest advertising revenues, while in Lithuania television is the most popular information channel with the largest share of advertising. The broad availability of regional television channels, many with local news programs, is another important characteristic of the Lithuanian TV news environment. In 2008, the average daily TV viewing time was increasing, as well as TV advertising share was in rise except for Estonia, where newspaper advertising is prevailing with 36% share of the total advertising market (see Table 1).

Table 1. Baltic TV market, 2008.

	Lithuania	Latvia	Estonia	Total
Population (in million)	3,366	2,271	1,340	6,977
GDP per capita (in EUR)	9,612	10,196	11,827	-
TV households (in %)*	99%	98%	97.1%	98%
No. of TV broadcasters	31 (4 national, 1 regional, 27 local)	28 (4 national)	4 (3 national, 1 local)	63
Viewing time per individual (in min)*	212	213	243	223
Advertising expenditure (in million EUR)	157,0	138,2	111,2	406,3
Advertising expenditure growth 2008 vs. 2007 (in %)	9%	3%	-3%	4%
TV advertising share (in %)	43%	36%	27%	36%
TV advertising growth 2008 vs. 2007 (in %)	1.8%	8.8%	-2.2%	2.2%
Newspaper advertising share (in %)	25%	18%	36%	26%
Newspaper advertising growth 2008 vs. 2007 (in %)	8.8%	-14.6%	-12.6%	-6.2%

Sources: TNS Gallup (2008, 2009a, 2009b); Balčytienė (2008); IP International Marketing Committee (2008); Economic and Social Development in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (2009)

\* Data collected in 2007

As mentioned, media regulatory climate, production traditions and consumption cultures can be very different even between small countries of the same geographic region. For example, differently from the Nordic countries, the three small Baltic countries have different funding mechanisms for public broadcasting stations (PSBs) and very competitive television markets. If in Denmark, Sweden and Norway PSBs are watched approximately by one third of the audience (between 30% and 40%), in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia audience shares of PSBs is

around 15% at most. In 2002, Estonia dropped advertising from the public service broadcaster which has had impact on programming structures, while Lithuania applies a mixed model of funding of its PSB programs (about 40% of the budget of LTV, the Lithuania's public service broadcaster, comes from advertising revenues).

### Balancing public interest imperatives with media market goals

As mentioned, media production does not happen in a vacuum. In contrast, any media content is affected by peculiar characteristics of a national setting, or to say it more precisely, by different political, economic, social and cultural conditions where these professional traditions have developed and are sustained. TV production is most clearly affected by economic factors such as market size in terms of TV households (numbers of local consumers) as well as per capita of GDP spending, for example to fund public service broadcasters in different countries, and by cultural factors.

Table 2. Output of broadcasting by genre in Lithuania, 2008 (%).

Genres	PSB output, LTV		Commercial stations output (hours)	
	hours	%	hours	%
Information programs	1,258	11.11	7,082	7.96
News (including sports)	458	4.04	4,096	4.6
Other information programs	800	7.06	2,986	3.35
Education	20	0.18	1,121	1.26
Culture	412	3.64	2,877	3.23
Religion	35	0.31	340	0.38
Entertainment	3,463	30.58	26,232	29.48
Movies, soap	1,991	17.58	6,082	6.83
Music	464	4.1	9,191	10.32
Sports, excluding sports news	491	4.34	735	0.83
Other entertainment	517	4.57	10,170	11.43
Other unclassified programs	931	8.22	10,728	12.05
Advertising	484	4.27	7,355	8.26
Total	11,324	100%	88,995	100%

Source: Culture, the Press and Sport 2008 (2009).

Indeed, media products (television production including) carry more than just informational or entertainment function. They transmit social beliefs that societies agree on. Therefore, the cultural factor (norms and values which guide production choices) has a much broader function to serve the cultural needs of the nation.

Although in Lithuania the generic diversity of TV programs across the four national coverage channels (1 PSB and 3 commercial stations) is fairly big ranging from hard news to softer programming and entertainment, the composition among different types of broadcasters looks very much the same (see Table 2). Although offering more hours in some sectors of softer programming (entertainment), commercial stations aim to keep balance in their output by providing news and information programs as well as movies and fiction in comparable amounts in terms of output hours with the public service broadcaster (LTV, the Lithuanian Television). As data in the Tables 3 and 4 shows, in recent years, commercial channels have significantly reduced their share of information and news programs, while dependence on the advertising revenues has been increasing and, consequently, amount of entertainment and soft (music) programming was growing on all channels.

Table 3. Output of public service broadcaster (LTV) by genre in Lithuania, 2005-2008 (in hours)

Genres	2005	2006	2007	2008
Information programs	1,234	1,098	1,208	1,258
News (including sports)	427	447	410	458
Other information programs	807	651	799	800
Education	0	0	19	20
Culture	350	248	267	412
Religion	76	47	55	35
Entertainment	1,970	2,103	2,760	3,463
Movies, soaps	1,082	2,830	1,532	1,991
Music	350	119	428	464
Sports, excluding sport news	184	219	183	491
Other entertainment	355	261	617	517
Other unclassified programs	1,215	1,319	436	931
Advertising	91	402	606	484
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,141</b>	<b>9,744</b>	<b>9,320</b>	<b>11,324</b>

Sources: Dragomir & Thompson (2008); Culture, the Press and Sport (2008, 2009).

Table 4. Output of commercial broadcasters by genre in Lithuania, 2005-2008 (in hours)

Genres	2005	2006	2007	2008
Information programs	16,855	8,227	7,463	7,082
News (including sports)	14,922	4,161	4,416	4,096
Other information programs	1,933	4,065	3,047	2,986
Education	805	1,409	1,338	1,121
Culture	1,617	3,592	2,535	2,877
Religion	79	146	279	340
Entertainment	31,256	20,226	20,671	26,232
Movies, soaps	6,260	31,491	3,391	6,082
Music	2,410	3,591	3,339	9,191
Sports, excluding sport news	850	1,135	845	735
Other entertainment	12,926	12,028	13,077	10,170
Other unclassified programs	10,205	12,116	11,837	10,728
Advertising	4,123	5,402	5,677	7,355
<b>Total</b>	<b>104,241</b>	<b>107,589</b>	<b>77,915</b>	<b>88,995</b>

Sources: Dragomir & Thompson (2008); Culture, the Press and Sport (2008, 2009).

Indeed, the existing differences between the output of PSB and commercial stations are minor. News, information programs, education, culture and religion account for 27% on PSB, and 21% on commercial channels. Entertainment programs, including movies and soaps, music, sports and other, have been dominating in general output with 61% of the programs on PSB and 58% on commercial broadcasters (see Table 2).

One might assume that fiction and entertainment is a particular prerogative of private commercial channels while public service broadcasters should aim more at fulfilling public interest obligations, but situation in other countries (for example, in French speaking Belgium) reveals significant amount of time devoted to fiction by PSB: in 2007, 35.3% of time was devoted to fiction against 10% of news and information (D'Haenens et al., 2009).

Similar results to the ones discussed above are also confirmed in another research study (Turčinavičiūtė, 2009) which was performed in Lithuania on 1-7 March 2009, and was conducted to identify how public affairs were covered in the news programs on public service (LTV) and commercial broadcaster (TV3).

In Lithuania, each of the four national coverage TV channels offers news programs. Generally, such practice – having professional journalists and newsroom – is considered to be a ‘quality measure’ of journalistic professionalism of the channel.

Quantitative content analysis was performed on two TV news programs – “Panorama” on the public service broadcaster LTV (audience share 13%), and the top

popular news program “TV3 News” on commercial channel TV3 (audience share 26%). “Panorama” covers the main news, business, culture, sports information and weather forecast broadcasted daily from 20:30 till 21:00. The program has been on air for 38 years and is the longest running program in Lithuanian TV history. The most popular TV3 channel, owned by Swedish company Modern Times Group, airs “TV3 News” with a similar news structure, except for cultural news. The program is broadcasted daily at 18:45-19:15. In 2008, “TV3 News” was watched by 12% of audience and was one of the most popular news programs, while “Panorama” accounted for a daily audience share of 6.3% (TNS Gallup, 2009b).

For content analysis, all news stories were analyzed except for sports news and weather forecast. In total, 12 news programs and 156 news items (93 – LTV and 63 – TV3) were included into content analysis. The coding scheme included 17 analytical categories (see Appendix A), however, only selected criteria were used to compare the quality of news programs and illustrate the main similarities and differences between PSB and private TV channel.

Each news item was differentiated between *international* and *domestic* news, serious (*hard*) and entertainment-type (*soft*) news. TV reports on political, policy, economical, social and cultural issues were considered as hard news, while the soft news usually was entertainment-focused, personalized and emotionally driven stories. The quality of news was also assessed by the depth of the news broadcasted, emphasizing the importance of balanced, explanatory and knowledge-enhancing information. News stories were analyzed with regard to the *depth* of information, news focus on *causes*, *effects* or *both*, diversity of *approaches* covered, number of *primary sources* quoted and *gender* of the news sources.

Despite existing differences in the mission of the two channels, the two channels have a quite similar news profile, including coverage of international and domestic, hard and soft news. As demonstrated in Table 5, TV news was dominated by the domestic news on both channels. However, a slight difference should be emphasized, as this kind of news was prevailing on LTV more often than TV3 (73% and 65% respectively). On both channels, majority of the news was considered as hard news, covering political, economical, societal and cultural news of local, national or international character. It is considered that such type of news is providing with significant information and knowledge for the audience as citizens, and only one fifth of the news analyzed was about entertainment, celebrities, and scandals. The proportion of hard and soft news was similar on both channels and, in fact, is very similar to what has been recently reported in other comparative studies (Curran et al, 2009).



Table 5. Selected news quality criteria (%)

	LTV	TV3
Location of news:		
international	26.88	34.92
domestic	73.12	65.08
Type of news:		
hard	72.04	77.78
soft	27.96	22.22
News depth:		
message	13.98	41.27
extended message	82.80	58.73
analysis	3.23	0
Focus of news:		
causes	22.58	50.79
effects	8.6	15.87
both	68.82	33.33
Number of primary sources:		
One	17.20	20.63
Two and more	54.84	46.03
none	27.96	33.33
Gender of news source:		
female	32.56	13
male	67.44	87
Total (N)	93	63

Source: Turčinavičiūtė (2009).

Studying news quality on the two channels, attention was also paid on the depth of news item differentiating between short fact-based messages, extended messages covering the context of event and analytical news providing with in-depth analysis of the event. It appears that extended messages explaining the public what happened and why are prevailing on PSB (83%). On TV3, the proportion of extended messages was only slightly larger than the share of short news (41% and 59% respectively). TV3 news was mostly reporting on the causes (51%), rather than providing information on both, causes and effects. In this respect, public service news covered more balanced and explanatory type of news, emphasizing both causes and effects of the event (69%).

Level of informativeness of the news is dependent not only on the level of explanation provided, but also by the primary sources of information covered on the news. When analyzing news coverage, it appears that two and more primary sources were usually presented on the news (55% – LTV and 46% – TV3). Finally, gender of the news sources was considered to reflect on the diversity of information sources. Apparently, male news sources were dominating on both, LTV

and TV3 channels with slightly better female representation on the public service. Every third news source was female on LTV "Panorama", while on TV3 women appeared as rare as once out of ten news sources (see Table 5). Apparently, the content analysis of the news programs illuminated relatively small differences between the public service and private broadcasters.

In addition to quantitative measures, in the same study interviews were performed with the news editors to assess the quality of both programs and their impact on public sphere (Turčinavičiūtė, 2009). The news editors were inquired about the news criteria, program audience, media functions and the role of the programs in meeting public interest criteria. News editor of the commercial TV3 channel argued that it is important to provide the public with thorough, relevant, and objective reporting, as well as interesting information, whereas public service news editor emphasized the importance of the news program for the public sphere and differentiated PSB from other commercial channels, mainly following business or political interests. News editors were also asked to rank their programs' performance with regard to the main media functions from the lowest (one) to the highest rank (five). As shown in Table 6, *information* and *control* functions were considered as well performed by both news programs. However, LTV news editor more positively assessed the channel's news program in setting a meaningful news agenda, representing diverse approaches and creating a public forum, also stimulating public interest and civic engagement into decision-making processes.

Table 6. TV news program performance (1 – poor, 5 – excellent)

Media functions	LTV	TV3
Observing, assessing and informing	5	5
Meaningful news agenda setting	5	3
Representating diverse opinions and creating a public forum	4	2
Stimulating public interest and civic engagement in public affairs	3	2
Controlling those in power	4	4

Source: Turčinavičiūtė (2009).

To conclude, the above discussion demonstrates that TV production in small countries is strongly affected by market pressures. At the same time, it shows that the analysis of broadcasting output cannot be reduced only to economic measures of the national environment where it takes place. As quantitative study of news programs indicates, it appears that TV channels seek to match professionalism requirements and aim to balance shifts towards softer programming in their general output with journalistic requirements followed in news production.

## **Discussion and further research needs**

The size and wealth of the market is a decisive parameter which needs to be taken into account when discussing media changes, development and journalism culture. Small news markets face different challenges and problems than big markets. As mentioned, an important factor necessary for the media to carry out its democratic functions (provide information, create public forums and observe those in power) is availability of resources, namely a rich advertising market, and different forms to fund media (subsidies from the state, tradition of public funding and so on).

On the other hand, economic conditions do not provide sufficient account on journalistic production, and other – more specific (journalistic cultural) – factors must be taken into account. An important factor here also is adequate journalistic culture, i.e. professional norms and requirements. Consequently, to assess how media actually serve democracy (also where media fail to meet the democratic performance expectations) requires a number of critical questions to be posed: Does media perform its democratic functions adequately? Whom do media serve – itself (media owners, advertisers), audiences (consumers or citizens) or the government?

Indeed, contemporary media systems are rapidly changing, with many challenges affecting national media structures and journalism cultures and culminating with more or less similar results, such as increased commercialization of the media, growing power of news sources or changes in news production and presentation and so on. In such context, the comparative research perspective becomes especially useful.

As demonstrated here, popularization and commercialization processes have affected production of both, PSB and commercial channels, blurring the differences in broadcasting output. Summing up, proliferation of popular news is changing traditional media formats which have usually been associated with public interest type of information – for instance news programs, political talk shows, analytical programs, documentaries, which nowadays include more popular content, personalized and sensational stories, visual and drama effects. The mission of informing a society became a secondary task for the media, concentrating on its commercial objectives rather than citizens needs. Therefore, media production research suggests certain challenges. First, it is important to once again review democratic media functions, and reassess its performance with regard to a changing media paradigm, as well as different political, economic and cultural context of the transitional media. Second, cross-national comparative analysis is needed to assess media performance and pluralism in the changing media environments, including the role of the national public service broadcaster organizations supposed to represent and serve public interest.

## ENDNOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> In this paper, the cultural factor draws attention to the notion of 'journalism culture' which is defined as the character and performance of journalism as an institution, profession and discourse in concrete political, economic, social and cultural situations (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Lauk, 2008; Mancini, 2008).
  - <sup>2</sup> Small countries in Europe are considered to be the ones having populations of less than 12 million.
  - <sup>3</sup> In linguistic terms, Lithuania is described as homogenous country while Estonia and Latvia have two media audiences (Estonian or Latvian and Russian speaking). Also, another linguistic distinction is evident in the Baltic States: Lithuanian and Latvian languages belong to the same Indo-European languages group (Baltic languages) while Estonian language belongs to Finno-Ugric group of languages. Lithuanian and Latvian, although having very close links, are fairly different languages as they have separated many centuries ago and their development to modern versions was influenced through different external pressures.
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## Appendix A

No.	Analytical Categories
1.	Location of news ( <i>international event; national/local even</i> )
2.	News topic ( <i>political, economic, science, culture, sports, celebrities, crime, other</i> )
3.	News type ( <i>hard, soft</i> )
4.	Overall tone of news ( <i>positive, negative, neutral</i> )
5.	News genre ( <i>message, extended message, analytical report</i> )
6.	7 W questions ( <i>Who? What? When? Where? Why? What does it mean? What next?</i> )
7.	Invited commentator ( <i>yes, no</i> )
8.	News focus ( <i>on causes, effects, both</i> )
9.	Diversity of approaches ( <i>one approach; two and more approaches</i> )
10.	Sources of information ( <i>primary, secondary, both</i> )
11.	Number of primary sources quoted ( <i>one, two and more</i> )
12.	Interviews with the public ( <i>yes, no</i> )
13.	Gender of news sources ( <i>male, female</i> )
14.	Exposing misbehavior of officials ( <i>yes, no</i> )
15.	Demonstration of personal life ( <i>yes, no</i> )
16.	Relevance of news – explanation of how the event will affect the public ( <i>yes, no</i> )
17.	Reporting from the site ( <i>yes, no</i> )

Source: Turčinavičiūtė (2009).

## **Utjecaj ekonomskih i kulturnih faktora na televizijsku produkciju u malim nacijama**

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### **SAŽETAK**

Analizirajući litvansku televizijsku produkciju (raznolikost i televizijsku proizvodnju vijesti na javnim i komercijalnim postajama), rasprava se kreće na nekoliko razina analize. Konkretno, ovaj rad pozornost usmjerava prema ekonomskim i novinarskim kulturnim parametrima kao ključnim faktorima koji utječu na promjene u suvremenim medijima u Litvi a drugim malim baltičkim nacijama. Kao što medijska praksa otkriva, liberalizacija medija, postepena tranzicija sa državno financiranog na tržišno usmjereni model i uvjeti profesionalnog novinarstva koji se mijenjaju, učinila je medije tri baltičkih država vrlo osjetljive na tržišne mehanizmi. S druge strane, malo medijsko tržište, smanjujuće mogućnosti medijskog oglašavanja i rastuća konkurencija između medijskih igrača postavljaju pogodne uvjete za komercijalizaciju i popularizaciju medijskog sadržaja. Kulturni pak faktor nije od manje važnosti pri procijeni televizijskih produkcijskih posebnosti u zemljama mlade demokracije. Na temelju empirijskih dokaza (analiza televizijske produkcije na različitim kanalima), autorice opažaju sve veći naglasak na zabavnim i laganim programima, a manje informativnih i analitičkih programa na javnim i komercijalnim televizijama. U isto vrijeme, primijećena su nastojanja da se održi novinarski profesionalizam (raznoliko i usklađeno izvještavanje) u televizijskim informativnim programima.

Ključne riječi: baltički mediji, litvanska televizijska produkcija, malo tržište, novinarska kultura, javni interes, javna služba, komercijalizacija